

Unstitching

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Someone asked:

I agree with you that we are individually “stitching” from moment to moment, our “feeling” of being alive—which we can call consciousness. So who is the stitcher? Gurdjieff gives us the idea that we each have a chief-feature or chief weakness that is instrumental in external and internal responses to the world—is this the stitcher? And is this stitcher to be “trusted”? Or is it that “something” else can grow within us, and without going into an infinite regress—study the way in which the usual stitching takes place within us, and lend—yet another word—humility to our all too human effort to be “in the moment”—or to put it another way—“in consciousness”.

My answer:

The “stitcher” is a process wired into the brain to enable a coherent perception of the world, and later trained to “correctly” perceive the world one grows up in. Yes, it is the infrastructure of what we often call “consciousness,” keeping in mind that this word has been used in different ways, sometimes contradictory ones. For example the stitcher itself is largely unconscious. It is an “it,” not really a “who,” it has little or no sense of “I.” It is possible sometimes to perceive the work of the stitcher: occasionally one catches a glimpse of unstitched perception and of it then being quickly conformed to what we call reality. Also, certain drugs like LSD can artificially break the grip of the stitcher.

It is possible to develop this power. Yes, a “humility” is required, a disillusionment about the objectivity of our usual perceptions and feelings. For example visual artists learn to unstash visual perception and “see” more directly. Musicians learn to hear notes, harmonies, rhythms, but most people just let the feeling of music wash over them. “The occult” is an art of unstitching impressions of numinousness and giving the parts names and structure—there is a current of this sort in some of Gurdjieff’s “ideas.” And so on, in many fields. With development of this power, one of the powers of “real I,” it becomes possible, for the few who are really serious, to direct the stitching: this is what it means to become a “master”, a real artist, a “composer”: to be able to take perception apart and then put it back together in a different order, to help people perceive and feel differently.

Unstitching is an aim of some traditional disciplines such as Zen, and tantric Buddhism. Castaneda’s “seeing” is another example. Is it a factor in the Gurdjieff work? It is not so much understood in that way, but it should be. Gurdjieff said we need to make the unconscious conscious—this is an aspect of that.